

Fifty Shades of Grey Consultation notes

Olivia and Naiki – 16yo girls from Wellington, attend Sacred Heart College in Lower Hutt (Catholic girls school)

What kind of films do you like watching?

- The girls both liked all movies and listen to Netflix recommendations, but especially liked musicals and horrors.

What was the latest film you have seen that you really like?

- They both really like *The Greatest Showman*

Have you or your friends/family seen the 50Shades film(s) before?

- Both had seen the first and the second films. Most of their other friends had not because they seemed too 'immature' to watch anything with that kind of sexual content. Both want to see the third film but did not want to watch it at the cinema. Their mums had read the books

How did you feel when you saw the film? Shocked? Bored? Curious? Wish you hadn't seen it nothing?

- They said that they weren't shocked at all because they already knew the type of content that it would include. They also were surprised that they weren't shocked and they expected more intense sex scenes"
- They later expressed that they did feel uncomfortable watching the sex scenes and felt weird watching the movies with others present. It didn't make them feel curious about exploring BDSM and said that wasn't for them but did state that it could be different for other people.
- "Just an uncomfortable thing to watch and not harmful"
- "It [BDSM] didn't interest me"
- "Doesn't make me curious, but it really depends on who you are"
- "Expected to be grossed-out but wasn't"

Was the film/series/books talked about at school?

- They said that no one really talked about them at school and no one that they know of other than their mums had read the books.
- "My brother thinks the movies are unrealistic and he is 18 but he said that he thinks it is gross if girls don't wax or shave their armpits"

Do your friends and family like it?

- Their mums had seen the movies and read the books. Their mums didn't understand why they would be interested but they didn't stop them from watching the films. One of the girls

mum and dad go to see the films together at the movies as a date night which she found gross. She then noted that she thought it was weird that the films were released in time for Valentine's day

- "Least romantic thing ever"

What do you think of the film (as a whole)? Did you like it?

- This question was harder to gauge because they were super critical of the film but still expressed keen interest to see what the third one was about

What did you think of Anastasia and Christian's relationship?

- "Not what I want in a relationship, too possessive"
- "Some people might like dominant males and they might do things they don't want to just to stay with their boyfriends"
- "He asks a lot of her, he makes her get waxed and to be on [oral] birth control. He doesn't consider the pain she has to go through with waxing and the possible harmful side effects of birth control. Everyone is different and not everyone can take birth control"
- They both had very realistic views of the unhealthy aspects of the relationship and highlighted that they were unable to relate to either character because of the flaws that made them seem not quite human. They thought that boys in particular would have a hard time seeing the power dynamics as unhealthy and that may influence them to not treat girls as equals.
- Called it not healthy or natural, but later said that the power dynamics reflect the world (dominant men/passive women)

What did you think about the sex scenes? Did you find the sex scenes 'strong'? or were they not so bad?

- "Younger boys may find it harder to see that their relationship is not realistic. I have a friend who watches porn and when he....did stuff with a girl....he was surprised by her lack of reaction and couldn't understand why she didn't seem to enjoy it."
- "Used her as a ragdoll"
- "Boys will struggle with understanding what is real and what isn't"
- They weren't as detailed as they thought they would be. They didn't make them feel curious about BDSM but the dominance role of Christian was something they didn't like. The sex itself made them feel uncomfortable but again it wasn't shocking.
- Not normal
- "I reckon it would be different if I was 18" (would not find problematic)
- N mentioned the sex scenes made her feel uncomfortable

Do you know what BDSM is? Is it talked about at school or in sex ed? Have you seen this sort of stuff in films/TV shows?

- Both girls stated that being in a catholic school they felt disadvantaged by the 'vanilla' content they were being taught that surrounded sex ed. They didn't learn about anything to do with the act of sex and said it was focused more on the repercussions of having sex.

- "We have a disadvantage going to a catholic school and only do a 6 week course in health about sex."
- One girl mentioned that two movies she had seen had more confronting content. One was a Keanu Reeves film where two women came over and blackmailed him into having sex and then paying them or would accuse him of rape. She found it really strange and she was not happy that the film lacked any warnings. Film is on Netflix and found that their blurb was really vague. She also mentioned *Nymphomaniac* and expressed that it had worse content – "gross".

Did you notice the themes of consent and using protection?

- Both girls noticed the condoms and after we brought up birth control they said that they remembered it was in the contract Anastasia had to sign and found that whole situation unfair in relation to the power dynamics of the relationship.

Do you think the film needs age-restricting? To what age?

- Both girls agreed that all of the films should be R16, especially the second film. They noted that the second one humanises Christian and shows why he is the way he is, specifying why his behaviour in the first movie is not normal. The first movie does not do that. They did say that watching it when you are 18 would be very different to watching when you are 16 because of maturity but they still think 16 year old should be allowed to watch them. The only difference is their reaction would come from a place of less maturity and they wouldn't be harmed. They cautioned that boys are different and said that they should be more mindful about what is reality.
- "If I was 18 I wouldn't feel like...ugh"
- "Childhood plays an important role in the message in the second film. It can shape who you are as a person for when you are older"
- "The second movie should definitely be R16"
- By 16 you can understand
- "I don't think there is really any positive message in the first film"
- Mentioned the fact that social media exposed YP to lots of sexual material. Sexting and nude selfies are reasonably common, but N&O understand the risks.
- "I can understand why it would be R18. There's lots of new ideas, it's quite shocking. But the average 16yo wouldn't feel pressure to do this. The average 16yo is curious about sex"
- "we can talk to our parents"
- Called for R16 with a note for 'explicit sex scenes'

How might depictions of sex be 'harmful' to younger people?

- The girls were vague on this. They didn't think the material is necessarily harmful it just might teach boys the wrong message about what girls want and what is reality. Someone who is too young though would not be able to internalise the sexual content because of their maturity.
- More of an issue for guys that it might encourage them to have sex like that. Concerned males would 'get ideas', as males are 'more influenced'

- With consent, it depends on the individual viewer but men have power normalised – the dominant male/passive female notion is normalised as how things should be
- Premature exposure to sex may give unrealistic ideas. “If you didn’t know much, it’s quite extreme to see”. “Some immature girls wouldn’t get it and BDSM is normalised.”. “If you didn’t know the film contained BDSM you’d be shocked.
- Risk of females willing to do anything for their beloved boyfriends, with males dominating and having control (girls seemed relatively novice re relationships, maybe a girls school thing? They mentioned they don’t have much contact with boys)

Positive messages?

That people can change. Christian changes from a dom to more normal

Your childhood has an effect on who you become (ie Christian’s negative childhood influenced his dom behaviour)

Why do you think it’s important we talk to young people about film classification?

- One girl said it made her feel confident in the ratings.
- “We know they are legit because they actually asked youth”

Would you like to receive feedback on the decision that we come to?

- They are happy to hear from Sue in an informal way but are interested to hear what the outcome is.

Other quotes that may be relevant

- “Warnings are important, Netflix now has this little box that comes up and says what content to expect.”
- “It would be hard at this age with parents who don’t want to talk about sex” a lot of their friends are unable to talk to their parents about sex due to rules and awkwardness
- “Explicit sex scenes is a good label and not just sex scenes”
- “Boys will be boys” relating to porn and unrealistic expectations